

**City of Reading  
City Council  
Work Session  
Monday, July 18, 2011**

**Councilors Attending:** V. Spencer, F. Acosta, M. Goodman-Hinnershitz, S. Marmarou, D. Reed, D. Sterner, J. Waltman

**Others Attending:** L. Kelleher, C. Younger, J. Nagel, C. Jones, G. Zolna, F. Denbowski, C. Edwards, L. Olsen, J. Kromer, R. Miller

Vaughn D. Spencer, President of Council, called the Work Session to order at 7:05 pm.

**Managing Director's Report**

Mr. Nagel read the report distributed to Council at the meeting covering the following:

- Update on the 2012 budget process
- Need to seek the renewal of the City's \$50M lever of credit
- City's attempt to avoid County and Municipal Court fees regarding tax and zoning issues

**Council Staff Report**

The Council Staff report is attached to the agenda. Ms. Kelleher stated that she and City staff have worked to successfully use Act 90 to block approximately 40 of 100 pre-registered people (due to delinquent taxes and fees and other issues) from purchasing properties at the June 29<sup>th</sup> tax sale. She stated that she and Legal Specialist Tonya Butler met with the County Treasurer, his Solicitor, and his staff last week to discuss the process used. She stated that all parties were pleased with the outcome and discussed various ways to fine tune the process.

Ms. Kelleher also noted the need to get the Redistricting Committee up and running. Appointments were to take place by the end of May. She noted the need for the Solicitor to further research the need for candidates coming onto the Redistricting Committee to go through the background process. She stated that as this is an ad-hoc Committee and not a formal Board, Authority, or Commission that has ongoing responsibilities, she believes that the background process could be avoided. She also asked the Solicitor to review participant's ability to serve on other Boards, Authorities, and Commissions.

**Economic Development Strategy**

Mr. Kromer provided an update explaining that City Council will be asked to approve

the Housing & Economic Development Strategy after the Economic Development Strategy piece has been fully defined. He stated that he has learned that the MSRT (Major Systems Rehabilitation Project) funding will be provided to the Ricktown area. He explained that a Codes tour has already been held in the expanded Centre Park area, where by total of 38 rental properties requiring maintenance have been identified. He expressed the belief that the majority of those property owners will not require assistance from the programs such as the MSRP.

### **Ricktown Project: Overview & Update**

Crystal Edwards stated that the Ricktown project began through Act 47 and the DCED request for the City to focus its resources on a specific area. She stated that the Ricktown area was selected due to it's proximity to Entertainment Square. She explained that the Ricktown name was drawn from the history of the area. She noted the major challenge of getting the neighborhood to come together. She expressed the belief that many residing in this area support this project as a community empowerment tool.

Mr. Olsen stated that he was engaged to create a master plan with the community. He explained that the Ricktown area runs from Schuylkill Avenue to North 4<sup>th</sup> Street and Washington to Buttonwood Street. He described the process used to develop a SWOT. He noted the new formation of a housing partnership and expressed the belief that the community supports the project.

Mr. Miller expressed his belief in the plan as it assembles all parties moving forward towards one goal. He noted how the MSRP will integrate with a variety of other home improvement programs available.

Mr. Waltman agreed with initiatives that build communities. However, he noted that various strong neighborhoods around the City struggle due to the pressures experienced from surrounding struggling neighborhoods.

Ms. Reed expressed the belief that the Ricktown project is an inappropriate approach to urban planning. She stated that she supports the effort but is concerned that the lack of planning overall has left other areas in need. She also noted concern with focusing all resources in this one area as there are so many other neighborhoods in need.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz expressed the belief that neighborhood planning should not occur before City-wide planning occurs. She also noted the need to consider the reality of the demographics and the availability of sustainable jobs in the City. She also noted the need for the City to focus its attention on reviving Penn Street.

Mr. Sterner agreed with the comments made around the table and stated that he supports the project and efforts in this area. He stated that although he agrees with the project, he also sees the need for improved City-wide planning.

Mr. Spencer inquired if the amount of private funding required has been predicted. Mr. Olsen stated that the group has not identified a budget or the amount of private funding that will be required to date.

### **Trash and Recycling Bid**

Mr. Zolna highlighted the project program bid, which is split into the separate trash and recycling collection areas. He explained that the program is split to increase the number of companies who can apply. He also noted the need to consider in-house recycling. He stated that the new contract will require an educational component.

Mr. Nagel highlighted the bid schedule, noting that the mandatory pre-bid meeting will be held on August 5<sup>th</sup> and the bid opening will occur on August 30<sup>th</sup>.

Mr. Spencer stated that the last update was provided to Council in April. He inquired why nothing more was done before now. He expressed the belief that timeliness issues may prevent the union from bidding on the Recycling Collection contract.

Mr. Zolna stated that changes to the bid were prepared and submitted to Purchasing and the Managing Director by early June. He stated that he is unsure why it has been delayed until July. He also expressed his belief in the in-house recycling collection program.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz agreed that the tight timeline created may limit the City's options. Mr. Zolna expressed the belief that the tight timeline should not prevent the internal program from being used.

Mr. Acosta noted the need to pass some relief on to citizens, especially in the trash and recycling collection fees. He also noted the need to provide City Council with sufficient time to review the responses to the bid.

Mr. Marmarou noted the need for the City to improve its handling of trash and recycling billing. He discovered a recent issue, whereby he learned that property owners still receive collection services even though they have delinquent bills.

### **Reading Recreation Commission**

Mr. Denbowski reviewed the agreement, which is eligible for enactment at the July 25<sup>th</sup> Regular Meeting of Council. He stated that the Reading School District approved the agreement at a meeting earlier this month. He stated that if the ordinance is approved, appointments to the Commission can begin. He stated that it is expected that the Commission will be up and operating by September.

Mr. Waltman inquired about the imbalance in funding. He stated that the funding model has the City providing about five (5) times more than the School District. Mr. Denbowski stated that the School District's funding model is based on a per student charge. He stated that this is the standard used by most Recreation Commissions. He stated that this model provides \$7.50 per student; currently the School District has 18K enrolled, which provides approximately \$135K annually to the Commission. He stated that \$135K is enough money to begin the Summer Playground program. He stated that the Commission will also be offering programs through the winter months. Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that the required funding provides the City's and School District's commitment to recreation programming for a five (5) year period. He also noted that the agreement also requires the City to continue maintenance of City facilities.

Mr. Acosta inquired about at large citizen participation. Mr. Denbowski replied that two (2) citizens will be appointed by the City and two (2) citizens will be appointed by the School District. He stated that the fifth citizen will be alternately appointed by the School District and the City in a manner similar to the Convention Center alternate appointment.

Mr. Acosta noted the need for the citizen's appointed to represent playground users.

Mr. Marmarou inquired if the Lancaster Recreation Commission has shared any difficulties or problems in its function. Mr. Denbowski stated that Recreation Commission in Lancaster has been in place for approximately 40 years. He stated that the task force received guidance from Sue Landes, who is the Executive Director of the Lancaster Recreation Commission. Mr. Acosta questioned the personnel cost and the ability of the City to continue to provide funding at that level for a five (5) year period. Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that the funding levels are set as a baseline. She noted the Recreation Commission's ability to obtain funding from a variety of sources. She agreed with the need to take care in the selection of Recreation Commission members.

Ms. Reed noted the need to jumpstart the PILOT programs to assist with the ongoing

maintenance at City facilities. Mr. Nagel expressed the belief that the Recreation Commissions is the wave of the future. He noted that many municipalities have difficulties in successfully providing recreation services.

Mr. Acosta agreed with the concept but noted the need to consider the proper maintenance of City facilities.

Mr. Waltman expressed his concern with increasing costs.

As no other issues were brought forward the Work Session was adjourned at 9pm.

*Respectfully submitted by Linda A. Kelleher CMC, City Clerk*